Gregory D. Brown

Duke University School of Medicine

Department of Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences

Department of Medicine

40 Duke Medicine Cir

Durham, NC, USA 27710

Phone (847) 927-0832

gregory.brown@duke.edu

11 August 2016

Tirthankar Ghosh

Managing Editor

*Internal Journal of Occupational Safety and Health*

Dear Prof. Ghosh:

We are pleased to submit an original research article entitled “Depressive Symptoms and Perceived Stress among Estate Rubber Tappers in Southern Sri Lanka” by Hemajith Tharindra, M.A., Gregory D. Brown, M.D., Kayla Stankevitz, M.Sc., Ashley Schoenfisch, Ph.D., M.S.P.H., Sarath Amarasinghe, Ph.D., M.Sc., Vijitha De Silva, M.B.B.S., M.D., M.Sc., L. Gayani Tillekeratne, M.D., M.Sc., and Truls Østbye, M.D., Ph.D. for consideration of publication to the *Internal Journal of Occupational Safety and Health.*

The rubber industry in Sri Lanka has a long history and remains a vital component of the Sri Lankan economy. Yet, rubber tappers are a minority group and face not only subsistence wages but also unhealthy physical living conditions. These poverty and psychosocial conditions serve as precipitating and perpetuating factors for mental distress. However, little is known about their prevalence of mental distress among rubber tappers.

We sought to address this knowledge gap by conducting structured interviews of rubber tappers in the Galle district of Sri Lanka. The prevalences of depression and high stress were calculated, and sociodemographic and work history predictors of these outcomes were assessed. We found that—based on the Peradeniya Depression Scale (PDS)—rubber tappers had a higher rate of depression at 9% compared to prior studies among other Sri Lankan populations at between 4.5-6.6%. Those who were widowed, divorced, or separated had a greater than 3.5-times higher prevalence of both depression and 2.5-times higher prevalence for high stress compared to those who were married. The prevalence of depression was also higher among those with more than 30 years of experience compared to their less experienced counterparts. The prevalence of high stress was higher among those persons of Tamil or other ethnicity compared to Sinhalese as well as among Christians compared to Buddhists.

This is significant because not only are the data some of the first to address psychosocial issues among rubber tappers, particularly Sri Lankan rubber tappers, but also the results start to point toward factors associated with psychological distress. We believe that this manuscript is appropriate for publication by the *Internal Journal of Occupational Safety and Health* because it provides new data on a vulnerable and typically hard-to-reach population serving as a guide to other vulnerable populations. Indeed, a strength of the study includes the use of a validated, culturally-specific scale for depression and a scale for stress that has also been validated in multiple south Asian countries. Furthermore, the paper can serve as a guiding point to help to foster psychosocial support mechanisms for the rubber tappers.

This manuscript has not been published and is not under consideration for publication elsewhere. We attest that all authors have made substantial contributions to the conception and design or analysis and interpretation of data as well as substantial contributions to drafting the article or revising it critically for important intellectual content. All authors have provided approval of the submitted manuscript.

If you feel that the manuscript is appropriate for your journal, we suggest the following reviewers:

Bin Nordin Rusli, [ruslinordin@yahoo.com](mailto:ruslinordin@yahoo.com)

Joseph Leonard, leonardjoseph85@hotmail.com

We are excited to submit our paper to *Internal Journal of Occupational Safety and Health* and eagerly look forward to your response. Thank you for your consideration!

Sincerely,



Gregory D. Brown, M.D.

Department of Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences

Department of Medicine

Duke University School of Medicine